



On the Safety Circuit

A Factsheet on Home Electrical Fire Prevention

Electrical fires in our homes claim the lives of 200 Americans each year and injure 1,500 more. Some of these fires are caused by electrical system failures and appliance defects, but many more are caused by the misuse and poor maintenance of electrical appliances, incorrectly installed wiring, and overloaded circuits and extension cords.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) would like consumers to know that there are simple steps you can take to prevent the loss of life and property resulting from electrical fires.

THE PROBLEM

During a typical year, home appliance and wiring problems account for 49,000 fires, hundreds of deaths, and \$670 million in property losses. Home electrical wiring causes twice as many fires as electrical appliances.

THE FACTS

December is the most dangerous month for electrical fires. Fire deaths are highest in winter months which call for more indoor activities and increases in lighting, heating, and appliance use. Most electrical wiring fires start in the bedroom.

THE CAUSE

Home Appliances

- Most electrical fires result from problems with "fixed wiring" such as faulty electrical outlets and old wiring. In urban areas, however, problems with cords and plugs, such as extension and appliance cords, are the primary cause of home electrical fires.
- Electric stoves are involved in 53 percent of home appliance-related fires. However, these fires are mostly the result of careless cooking rather than the stove's malfunction.

- Electrical stoves and fixed heating units cause the most residential fire deaths, while electric stoves and portable heaters are the leading cause of residential fire injuries.

Electrical Wiring

- In urban areas, faulty wiring accounts for 28 percent of residential electrical fires.
- Nearly 30 percent of home electrical wiring fires can be traced to the misuse of electric cords, such as overloading circuits, poor maintenance and running the cords under rugs or in high traffic areas.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- Routinely check your electrical appliances and wiring.
- Frayed wires can cause fires. Replace all worn, old, or damaged appliance cords immediately.
- Use electrical extension cords wisely and don't overload them.
- Keep electrical appliances away from wet floors and counters; pay special care to electrical appliances in the bathroom and kitchen.
- When buying electrical appliances look for products which meet the UL standard for safety.
- Don't allow children to play with or around electrical appliances like space heaters, irons and hair dryers.
- Keep clothes, curtains and other potentially combustible items at least three feet from all heaters.

- If an appliance has a three-prong plug, use it only in a three-slot outlet. Never force it to fit into a two-slot outlet or extension cord.
- Never overload extension cords or wall sockets. Immediately shut off, then professionally replace, light switches that are hot to the touch and lights that flicker. Use safety closures to "child-proof" electrical outlets.
- Check your electrical tools regularly for signs of wear. If the cords are frayed or cracked, replace them. Replace any tool if it causes even small electrical shocks, overheats, shorts out or gives off smoke or sparks.

Finally, having a working smoke detector dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. And remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.



For More Information Contact:
The United States Fire
Administration
Office of Fire Management Programs
16825 South Seton Avenue
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

Or visit the USFA website:
www.usfa.fema.gov